

[73-42-40383]

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
31 October 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

MIDDLE EAST

Situation Report Number 95
(as of 0630 EST)

State Dept review
completed

THE MILITARY SITUATION

GENERAL

(All times cited in military paragraphs are Cairo/Tel Aviv time, unless otherwise specified.)

1. UN field posts around Ismailia reported the landing of 10 unidentified helicopters south of the city last night, followed by grenade explosions, small arms fire, and numerous flares in the vicinity. The helicopters left shortly thereafter. The nationality of the persons aboard is unknown. Calm prevailed in Sinai during the remainder of the night.

2. In the morning, two Israeli aircraft flew reconnaissance flights over the Gulf of Suez. Six Egyptian aircraft apparently scrambled in reaction to the Israeli flights. No approach was made however, as the Israelis withdrew and both sides resumed normal defensive patrols.

3. The Israelis reported a fedayeen rocket attack on an Israeli village near Zefat last evening. Otherwise, the northern front was calm over night. Defensive patrols by Israeli aircraft began at dawn.

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[REDACTED]

5. The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron still numbers 91 units--38 surface combatants, 23 submarines, and 30 support ships. Of the 38 combatants, 25 are major surface combatants, nine are amphibious landing ships, and four are minesweepers. The two Soviet tank landing ships which exited the Black Sea yesterday with naval infantry aboard are in the Aegean Sea this morning. The three combatants--a missile frigate and two destroyers--which passed south through the Bosphorus on 29 October are now in the vicinity of the USS John F. Kennedy southwest of Crete. Surveillance of the Kennedy as well as the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt and USS Independence continues.

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SUEZ CITY

9. Control of Suez City is almost equally divided between the Egyptians and the Israelis according to an Associated Press correspondent. The two sides apparently face each other across 30 yards of rubble in the center of the town. The Israelis continue to guard all exits to the city.

SYRIAN FRONT

10. The Syrians have complained to the UN Truce Supervisory Organization that the Israelis have occupied additional territory after the cease-fire. On 26 October the Israelis occupied the highest peak on the Mount Hermon ridge. Yesterday, the Israelis took another hill about four kilometers farther northeast along the ridge using helicopters. This position was not occupied by Syrian troops when taken by the Israelis, but Damascus claims the action was in violation of the cease-fire.

PRISONERS OF WAR

11. Foreign Minister Eban during a conversation yesterday with the US Ambassador to Israel again expressed Tel Aviv's great concern over the fate of Israeli POWs held by Egypt and Syria. He said that Israel's aim with regard to the POWs held by Cairo is to have a total prisoner exchange within a week or so. Eban made it clear that Cairo must fulfill its obligations under the Geneva Convention and that there was a direct relationship between progress by Egypt on the POW issue and Israeli actions concerning humanitarian measures toward the Egyptian Third Army.

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12. Eban expressed the most concern about Israeli POWs held by Syria, emphasizing that only immediate visits by International Red Cross officials to Syria would insure the survival of these prisoners. He noted that Tel Aviv was starting to document Syrian atrocities against Israeli-POWs which only served to create a terrible apprehension in Israel about their fate.

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14. In Cairo, meanwhile, the semi-official daily Al Ahram reported that Egyptian authorities yesterday allowed the head of the Red Cross there to visit Israeli wounded in Egyptian hospitals. An ICRC announcement in Geneva said 45 Israeli POWs were visited.

UNITED NATIONS

15. The announcement of Canadian support to the UN Emergency Force signals a modification to the ban on involvement of NATO and Warsaw Pact members. Egypt gave its final approval for Canadian participation only with the understanding that Ottawa's contingent would be limited to performing support functions. Secretary-General Waldheim may use this incident to underline the difficulties of assembling an international army without tapping the resources of the more militarily advanced states in order to gain additional technical exceptions to the ban.

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ISRAEL-US

16. Prime Minister Meir left Tel Aviv this morning for Washington for talks with President Nixon.

FEDAYEEN

17. According to a report from the US Embassy in Beirut, the absence of fedayeen efforts to disrupt the cease-fire by cross-border and terrorist operations reflects fedayeen reluctance to incur the wrath of Arab governments now engaged in post-war political maneuverings. The fedayeen are concentrating on political activity designed to insure a place for themselves in any future political settlement with Israel, as well as to shore up their greatly weakened prestige and influence with Arab governments as a result of the failure of the fedayeen to make a significant military contribution during the war.

18. The Embassy reports that major fedayeen leaders are talking in relatively moderate terms about participating in peace negotiations and are attempting to define a common Palestinian position for such negotiations. It believes that Fatah leader Yasir Arafat will likely have the decisive voice in the ultimate decision. Fedayeen leaders are for the first time openly advocating the creation of an independent Palestinian entity located outside Israel's pre-June 1967 boundaries. The idea reportedly being given the most attention is the endorsement of the concept that such a state would consist of the Jordan River West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

19. The Embassy believes that although all the evidence at the moment points to a determination by the main fedayeen groups to keep the peace and not rock the boat by provoking armed violence, a reversion to extremism and violence could occur should fedayeen political aspirations be badly disappointed once again.